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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Reconnaissance in Modern Operations
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Reconnaissance in Modern Operations and Battles

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The requirements for reconnaissance in modern operations have increased considerably, its organization and conduct have become complicated, and the volume of reconnaissance tasks has increased while at the same time the time available for completing these tasks has been sharply reduced.

Data on the enemy have to be obtained with great accuracy, in an extremely limited time frame and over a vast space, when the main enemy combat means are primarily in the operational depth. Therefore, this will have to be done under conditions of aggressive opposition to our reconnaissance, while attempts are being made to localize or destroy its forces and means and deceive it. Aerial reconnaissance has to negotiate a strong enemy air defense.

It is obvious that the performance of reconnaissance tasks under such conditions requires excellent training of personnel, a high level of technical equipping of the reconnaissance units and subunits, and high combat readiness of these units.

In practice, however, in a number of instances, substantial deficiencies are observed in the organization and conduct of reconnaissance in exercises. Thus, staffs as a rule are late in organizing reconnaissance when a meeting battle and engagement are anticipated: reconnaissance organs are sent out after the decision to march is made and drawn up, i.e., almost at the same time as the march security organs, and because of this cannot be separated from the latter. Such instances were noted in exercises in the Far East Military District in 1965 and in the Leningrad Military District in 1966. Aerial reconnaissance is not being organized and conducted to the required depth, and radio and radiotechnical means are not being deployed in time. Reconnaissance efforts are not being expanded in the initial stages of a meeting battle and engagement.

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Reconnaissance is conducted primarily by observation in an offensive. It makes almost no use of aerial photography in a battle. Reconnaissance of water obstacles is especially poorly organized when an assault crossing is made of them from the march in the operational depth of the enemy defense. This is what happened in the exercises of the Leningrad and Baltic military districts in 1966, in which reconnaissance was limited to observation of the enemy from our shore prior to an assault crossing of water obstacles.

The directing bodies of the exercises sometimes substitute hypothetical data for actual reconnaissance activities. For example, in one of the exercises in the Baltic Military District in 1966, the directing body fully disclosed the position of the defending troops to the attacking side, which made the attackers overconfident. The defending troops changed their defended areas and positions during the night. The reconnaissance of the attacking troops found out nothing about the nature of the defense and detected only a withdrawal of the "enemy" to a depth of three to four kilometers. As a consequence of this the nuclear strikes and artillery preparation of the attacking troops on the morning of the second day, did not produce results.

There also are cases in which reliable communications with the reconnaissance organs, especially with the reconnaissance groups and individual reconnaissance patrols of the divisions and regiments, are not ensured when they are separated the maximum distance from the staffs of the large units and units.

In our view, one of the ways of eliminating the deficiencies in the organization and conduct of reconnaissance is further, extremely thorough study of the manuals, regulations and guides regarding operational and tactical reconnaissance, which make it obligatory for formation and large unit commanders of all levels to organize reconnaissance on a timely basis, conduct it continuously and purposefully, and define precisely its targets and tasks, the axes on which to concentrate its main efforts, the nature and reliability of the data and the time frame for submitting them.

Intensive combat training of reconnaissance units and subunits also is needed. Training practice shows that it is desirable to conduct exercises for reconnaissance, aviation,

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special and radiotechnical subunits simultaneously with tactical-special exercises for the rocket troops, communications and engineer units and others. This makes it possible to assign the reconnaissance units tasks to detect real targets under conditions of camouflage of them, engineer preparation of the terrain, and the presence of simulated targets and areas of dispersal, which will exclude arbitrary situations.

We need to constantly improve and persistently work out methods for integrated utilization of the reconnaissance forces and means in all the branches of the armed forces to detect enemy nuclear weapons and his main groupings, classify targets properly, determine their coordinates with high accuracy, and transmit data on them to the appropriate command posts quickly.

One of the conditions for accurate reconnaissance work is continuous and reliable communications with the reconnaissance organs. For this purpose it is necessary to accelerate the development and introduction into these organs of radio sets with increased operating range and secure communications equipment. In addition, it is necessary to allocate more powerful radio sets to the reconnaissance organs, and in some cases, when feasible, to send out radio-relay stations following the reconnaissance groups.

The experience of many exercises corroborates the desirability of a method of training whereby the formation and large unit commanders of all levels, after clarifying a combat task and assessing the situation, first give orders for reconnaissance, then the staffs immediately organize it. Preliminary instructions, which orient the reconnaissance organs toward carrying out their prospective tasks in advance, are of great importance. This considerably accelerates sending out the reconnaissance organs, which have to be in constant readiness for action with their radio and radiotechnical reconnaissance means, as a rule, already set up.

It must be noted that there are instances in the troops in which an evaluation of the work of a reconnaissance organ is made only on the basis of the content of the report on the enemy by the chief of intelligence. In our view, the work of a reconnaissance organ and the staff as a whole should be evaluated mainly on the basis of skilful organization and positive results

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of reconnaissance.

A positive example of the work of a front commander and staff to organize reconnaissance and concentrate its efforts on the most important targets, is a command-staff exercise conducted in the Baltic Military District in 1966. The commander and staff, having received certain information regarding the disposition areas of the missile/nuclear means of the "enemy", immediately assigned reconnaissance aviation aircraft and several special-purpose reconnaissance groups to reconnaissance of these areas and accurate detection of the targets located in them, and also targeted part of the forces and means of radio and radiotechnical reconnaissance against these areas. Throughout the exercise the efforts of reconnaissance were concentrated on the most important axes and in the areas in which the "enemy" probably was located.

We think a front, which has various reconnaissance forces and means in its table of organization, is in a position to and must, insofar as possible, conduct reconnaissance to the entire depth of a theater of military operations; an army and army corps -- to a depth of 250 to 400 kilometers, a division -- up to 100 kilometers, and a regiment -- up to 50 kilometers. Whereas a front, army and division have the necessary forces and means to conduct reconnaissance to the depth indicated, an army corps at present does not have such means at its disposal. And this means that army corps which are supposed to carry out combat actions on separate, often unique axes, will experience serious difficulties in conducting reconnaissance.

Obviously it is time to examine the question as to an army corps acquiring organic reconnaissance forces and means. In our opinion, it is desirable for an army corps to have a separate reconnaissance battalion made up of four companies (radio, radiotechnical, and long-range reconnaissance companies and a mixed ground reconnaissance company), and also a radiation and chemical reconnaissance platoon. The radio and radiotechnical companies must have equipment which can reconnoiter enemy ground radio sets at a range of at least 250 kilometers and enemy ground radiotechnical means -- at 150 kilometers, which will allow the army corps to fulfil its tasks. In addition, a reconnaissance squadron equipped with aircraft and helicopters is needed.



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When conducting combat actions under polar conditions, in mountainous or desert terrain, on coastal or other independent axes, the ground reconnaissance organs of an army corps have to operate without roads. When penetrating an enemy disposition, reconnaissance groups, patrols, and long-range reconnaissance groups will be forced to carry out long-distance bypass maneuvering in difficult terrain conditions. It is desirable to send these organs out a long time before the designated reconnaissance time period or to airlift them to certain areas on aircraft and helicopters. In northern and other areas which are difficult to negotiate, cross-country combat vehicles may be used. Reconnaissance radio and radiotechnical equipment must be mounted on vehicles having cross-country capability. In view of the difficult conditions, aerial reconnaissance in support of an army corps in general, and reconnaissance from helicopters by the organic corps reconnaissance organs in particular, will have an especially important role.

At the same time the highly important new questions of organizing and conducting reconnaissance in modern operations and battles have become pressing. They have to be resolved in their theoretical, T/O authorization, operational-tactical, engineer-technical, economic and other aspects. New methods of conducting reconnaissance and making maximum use of its forces and means should be sought.

In so doing special attention must be devoted to improving the methods by which all types of aviation conduct aerial reconnaissance while they are fulfilling combat tasks, and also to developing methods of assured reception of reconnaissance data from on board an aircraft.

The question of conducting reconnaissance in force, particularly prior to an offensive, also is important. It seldom was conducted in recent exercises, because of the desire to achieve surprise of attack. It is very important to achieve surprise in going over to the offensive, but this must not lead to rejection of reconnaissance in force if it is needed, especially if the troops are preparing for combat actions without the employment of nuclear weapons at that moment. In organizing reconnaissance in force it is necessary to make fuller use of the experience of the Great Patriotic War, in which such reconnaissance was one of the main methods of revealing the

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nature of the enemy defense. This experience must be used in application to present conditions.

In our opinion, reconnaissance in force also can and must be conducted when weapons of mass destruction will be employed. In this case it should be conducted day and night, at different times in individual sectors and on a broad front by motorized rifle subunits with tanks in up to company strength, and sometimes even battalion strength when supported by artillery. The objective of such reconnaissance in force will be to reveal the enemy's system of defense, primarily the disposition areas of his tactical missiles and the fire positions of artillery, especially nuclear artillery, so that our nuclear strikes will not be delivered against an "empty" area. The actions of the subunits which are allocated for reconnaissance in force immediately before an offensive, and which are rapidly penetrating the enemy disposition, can develop into a general offensive. In anticipation of this, reconnaissance in force should be conducted by reinforced battalions supported by artillery and aviation.

Aerial, radio, radiotechnical, long-range, radar and all other forms of field reconnaissance, have to be conducted during reconnaissance in force, in order to obtain data on an operational, as well as a tactical, scale. The tasks of conducting reconnaissance in force during an offensive must also be performed by the forward detachments, security organs, and subunits and units which have pulled out ahead, which destroy the enemy covering troops, and, exploiting the results of the tactical nuclear strikes, reveal the main enemy forces and most important targets through aggressive offensive actions.

In our view, the methods of conducting radiation, chemical and bacteriological reconnaissance and the upgrading of existing reconnaissance equipment require further study and improvement.

When organizing reconnaissance, special attention must be devoted to increasing the effectiveness of measures for timely collection and processing of the data obtained, the data on enemy missile/nuclear means and other important targets first, and also to reporting the data to the command without delay, and data on especially important targets -- directly to the commander. In particular, in order to greatly improve control over the


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operating reconnaissance organs, and also to considerably accelerate the collection and processing of reconnaissance data, in our view, mobile control and reconnaissance data collection posts are needed at the division to front level. These posts must be built on the basis of cross-country armored vehicles equipped with the necessary technical means, high-speed radio communications with automatic secure communications equipment, and radio receivers.

The decisive condition for successful fulfilment of the immense tasks of reconnaissance, and timely discovery of the plans, intentions, and capabilities of the enemy under the present complex conditions is high-level moral-political, military-technical and special reconnaissance training of the officers and staffs, and also excellent combat training and skill of the units and subunits of all types of reconnaissance. The success of this work invariably is attendant upon the officers having thorough knowledge of the operational-tactical concepts, procedures and methods of combat actions, armament and equipment of our probable enemies and everything new they intend to employ.

Officers receive basic training in all these matters in military educational institutions. However, once in the troops they must use all available ways (lectures, group studies, war games, command-staff exercises and troop exercises) to persistently and constantly improve both their theoretical knowledge and their practical skills in the work of organizing and conducting reconnaissance of a specific enemy in the probable theater of military operations.

It is highly desirable to make a practice of training assemblies for intelligence officers, in which tactics, armament, equipment, and all other new information on the enemy are studied in detail. The major problems of the organization and conduct of reconnaissance should be worked out by giving short problems on specific topics and in special reconnaissance exercises to which subunits and units of all types of reconnaissance are allocated. It is useful to conduct training assemblies of reconnaissance subunits by types of reconnaissance, preparing the necessary resources for this at the training centers.

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In reconnaissance activities in combined-arms exercises, the umpires must not introduce any arbitrary or hypothetical

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situations for the operating troops. Reconnaissance must fulfil its tasks as though in combat, and the commanders of the operating sides are obligated to obtain all information on the "enemy" only by using the reconnaissance they actually organize. Commanders and staffs should be "punished" for their lack of knowledge of a situation by unexpected aggressive "enemy" actions.

Reconnaissance aviation of an air army or of the military district air forces, and subunits of the radio, radiotechnical, special and other reconnaissance units of the armies and military district, have to be allocated to divisional exercises.

Through all these and other measures it is possible to achieve a high level of field training not only of reconnaissance personnel, but also of reconnaissance subunits and units as a whole, to give commanders and staffs needed practice in organizing reconnaissance and controlling its forces and means during combat actions, and to teach them to analyze reconnaissance data correctly and act upon them in a timely manner.

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